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U.S. Summit Stance: Nuclear Testing Will Go On

The following article is based on reporting by Michael R. Gordon and Leslie H. Gelb and was written by Mr. Gelb.

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 3 — For the foreseeable future, the United States will not agree to join a July 30 Soviet moratorium on all nuclear testing or agree to a total test ban treaty, according to senior Reagan Administration officials.

The officials said President Reagan would take this position — on the ground that a total ban could not be verified — when he meets with the Soviet leader, Mikhail S. Gorbachev, at the summit meeting scheduled for Nov. 19-20 in Geneva.

But even if the two sides could agree on means to verify such a treaty, the Administration is determined to continue testing to develop new nuclear warheads, officials said.

"Verification is not the only or main stumbling block to agreement," said Kenneth L. Adelman, the director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.

The test ban proposal has been a prominent issue in the arms control debate since the Soviet Union announced July 30 that it was halting nuclear testing from Aug. 6 to the end of the year, and invited the United States to follow suit.

The United States has announced that it has conducted two tests since the Soviet offer, including one on the day that the Soviet Foreign Minister, Eduard A. Shevardnadze, met with President Reagan.

American officials also contend that a test ban would not prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, despite the insistence of most signers of the 1968 treaty to stop the spread of nuclear weapons that a ban is essential.

Officials from the Pentagon, State Department, White House and intelligence agencies also made these points:

¶For more than two years, there has been no interdepartmental study of the ability to verify a test ban, although the weight of expert opinion in and out of the Administration holds that the difficulties could be worked out.

¶Despite Administration statements that Moscow stepped up its nuclear tests before proposing its moratorium, intelligence experts estimated that Russian testing up to August was "average."

¶A ban would not seriously impede the development of warheads for new MX and Midgetman missiles, but it would affect the development of a new warhead for the Trident II missile and the development of nuclear "Star Wars" antiballistic missile systems.

The Historical Record

Opponents of a test moratorium say the historical record shows that Moscow cannot be trusted.

In 1958 President Eisenhower announced that the United States would observe a moratorium on tests if the Soviet Union did the same. Both sides stopped testing until August 1961, when the Soviet Union began a sizable test program. Spurgeon M. Keeney Jr., a former arms control official who is now the director of the private Arms Control Association, noted that the Soviet decision to resume testing came after President Eisenhower said the moratorium had lapsed and after the French began testing.

The Kennedy Administration negotiated a treaty prohibiting testing in the atmosphere, under water and in space.

In 1974 the Nixon Administration negotiated the Threshold Test Ban Treaty, which limited underground tests to 150 kilotons. The Ford Administration followed with a treaty that extended this limit to peaceful nuclear explosions. These treaties were not submitted to the United States Senate for approval, but both sides say they are adhering to the treaty limits.

The Carter Administration initially sought a comprehensive test ban treaty of unlimited duration, but later decided to work for a three-year ban. American and Soviet negotiators reached agree-

ment on important measures, including placing seismic monitoring devices at 10 sites in each country for verification. But the talks fell by the wayside after the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in December 1979.

The Reagan Administration has said that a comprehensive ban is a long-term goal, but it has not sought to resume the comprehensive test ban talks.

Testing Proposals

After Moscow announced its testing moratorium, the Administration called it a propaganda move and unveiled its own proposal to improve verification of the threshold test treaties, beginning with an American to Soviet experts to visit a United States test site.

The Soviet position has been that the threshold treaties can be verified and should be approved.

Robert C. McFarlane, the national security adviser, charged that Moscow "accelerated the number of tests that they've had so that they wouldn't need to test for the next five months or so."

Administration officials say that this charge is based, in part, on satellite observations that showed the Soviet Union speeded preparations for several nuclear tests. But they now say that only some of the tests were actually executed before the moratorium.

These officials also now say the number of Soviet tests carried out in the first seven months of 1985, before the moratorium, is in line with past Soviet annual testing totals and that the Soviets have forgone tests in August and September, which traditionally have been heavy testing months.

Ola Dahlman, research director of the Swedish National Defense Research Institute, which has a seismic monitoring capability, said in an interview that "there is no significant difference between this year and preceding years."

The Verification Issue

In rejecting the Soviet offer, Administration spokesmen cited verification problems. But other explanations were offered in subsequent public statements, including one by Richard L. Wagner Jr., an Assistant Secretary of Defense with responsibility for nuclear weapons programs.

"Even if effectively verified, a comprehensive test ban would not be in the national security interests of the U.S.," he told Congress.

Moreover, officials said that no formal interdepartmental review of the evolving abilities to verify a ban has been conducted in over two years, despite some advances in verification.

Since the mid-1970's "there have been some important changes in capability resulting from steady progress in our research program in geophysics and explosion seismology," said Dr. Ralph W. Alewine 3d, a scientist at the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency said in recent Congressional testimony.

A particularly important research program is a joint American-Norwegian array of seismic sensors in southern Norway, which includes sensors that are better at picking up high-frequency signals than other seismic devices are.

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